

Helping Yourself through Depression

Self-Care.

See a counselor. Talking is a powerful way of combating your depression. There is nothing shameful about recognizing you have a problem you alone cannot seem to resolve and to seek the help of a therapist. Asking for help is a brave act.

Take any help offered to you.

Set realistic goals for yourself. Break up large tasks into small ones, set some priorities and do what you can as you can. Give yourself permission to do less when you feel down.

Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately. Often during treatment for depression, sleep and appetite will begin to improve before your depressed mood lifts.

Spend time outdoors. Soak up some sun.

Get sleep that reflects sunlight patterns. Wake early and go to bed early.

Stay away from drugs and alcohol. Using drugs or alcohol to feel better is harmful to you. If you use alcohol or drugs, be honest and tell your therapist or doctor because it affects your care plan.

Get a massage. It is not known how massage might work to help depression, but it may be that it reduces the level of stress hormones or tension in the body.

“Craig lets me know he is struggling and assures me he will talk about it when he is able to verbalize what he is thinking and feeling.”

Belinda Schafbuch

Thoughts.

Practice self-compassion. Talk to yourself as if you were talking to someone else you love.

Be confident. Act against the critical inner voice that tells you nothing will help. Remember, its only purpose is to keep you from feeling better.

Think specific. Regard setbacks and disappointments as temporary, specific and surmountable.

Challenge depressive thoughts. Depressive thinking often goes way beyond the facts. Often the fair and realistic thought is simply to remind yourself that you don't have enough information to know for certain what's happening. If a friend cancels a lunch date, a depressive thought might be “She doesn't like me”. A realistic thought might be “I don't know why she cancelled; maybe something urgent came up. It's only lunch.”

“For me, depression comes with lots of thoughts that aren't right and true. Battling those thoughts with True thoughts is really important. I need to know Truth from God's word to do this well. Also, when I'm struggling, having someone with whom I can share those thoughts and who will help me recognize what is True and what is not is very helpful.”

Summer Vespstad

Talk back to depressive thinking. Don't allow depressive thinking to happen without replying to it. Every time you talk back, you make the depressive thinking weaker and the realistic thinking stronger. Only with time and repetition does realistic thinking – the truth – begin to feel true to you.

Socialization.

Reach out to friends. Try not to isolate yourself. Try to spend time with other people and confide in a trusted friend or relative.

Think about joining an on-line community or local support group. Support groups for people with depression can help you connect to others facing similar challenges and share experiences.

Minimize your media use. Give your focus to real relationships with real people. Make careful, positive choices when you do use media.

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Behavior.

“Starting the day with quiet time and prayer does help. I am still struggling, but I’ve found that does set the tone for my day and does make a difference.”
Kristi Steil

Start your day with a routine. Find a routine that works for you that include a healthy diet (whole, natural, unprocessed food and lots of water), exercise and regular sleep patterns. Use sticky notes as reminders or use a planner to stay organized.

Get out and move. Though easier said than done, the times you feel most like slumping on the couch are the moments you should force yourself to take a walk, go to a movie, a ballgame or another event or activity that you once enjoyed. Participate

in religious, social or other activities.

Watch a funny TV show. It may seem silly or all too simple but anything that make you laugh or smile can actually help convince your brain you are happy.

Act “as if”. Do things you normally enjoy doing, or know you should do. Act “as if” you weren’t depressed.

Surround yourself with positive things. View, read and listen to positive media and music.

Learn more about depression. Knowledge increases your sense of power over your illness.

Reduce academic stress if you are in school. Using academic supports such as study groups, tutors and the campus writing center can make classwork easier and give you encouragement from others.

Spirituality.

Pray always. Pray over everything, including (especially!) your trials and afflictions.

Feast on the words of Christ. Trust in His truth.

Believe Christ. Know that He understands and accompanies you through everything, and can and will heal your pains.

Find meaningful ways to serve and comfort others. Serve others while still meeting your own basic needs. “Love they neighbor as thyself.”

“Far and above everything else, forcing myself into God’s Word and reinforcing my thoughts with God’s truth [help me during a depressive episode]. ...Further down the list [is] serving others. I have to keep my mind and body busy with good things that are not about me.”
Cinnamon Dickens

Reducing the Risk of Relapse.

Plan ahead for stress. Some stressful events can be predicted - plan ahead for these events to make them less difficult.

When possible, introduce the stress gradually. If, for example, you are returning to work soon, you might check to see if you could go back part-time at first or take 12 credits instead of a full load if you are in college.

Simplify your life. If you are taking a night school course, for example, give yourself permission to eat out more often or have a slightly less tidy home.

“Exercise. Read the Bible. Pray.”
Craig Schafbuch

Keep up your self-care. How do you keep yourself balanced? Don’t give these things up when you need them the most. If a weekly lunch with a close friend is important to you, keep doing it. If exercise helps a lot, do everything you can to keep exercising during stressful times.

Reduce your obligations. Plan ahead to scale back the demands on your energy in the event of depression. For example, perhaps you could get an agreement in advance to get help with childcare from a family member.

Sources:

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